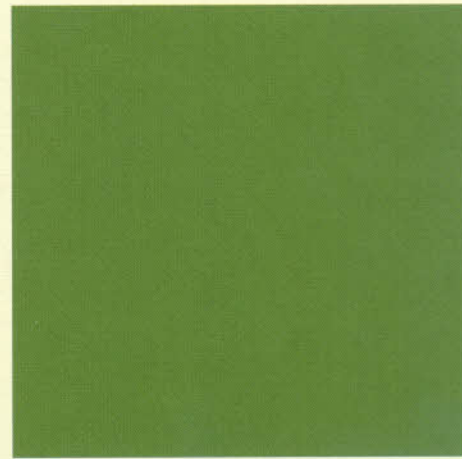
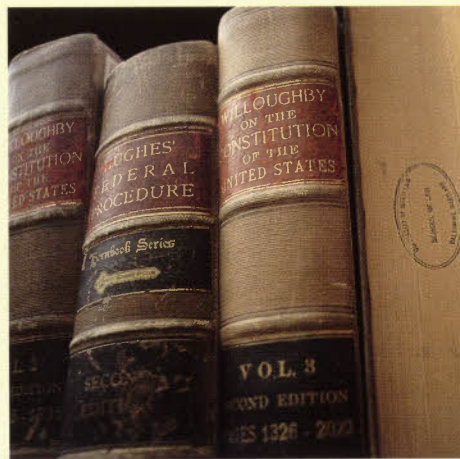
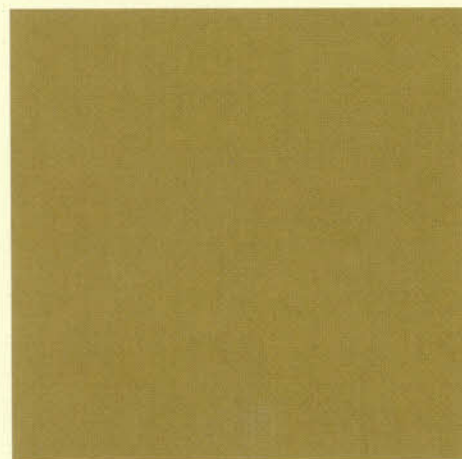
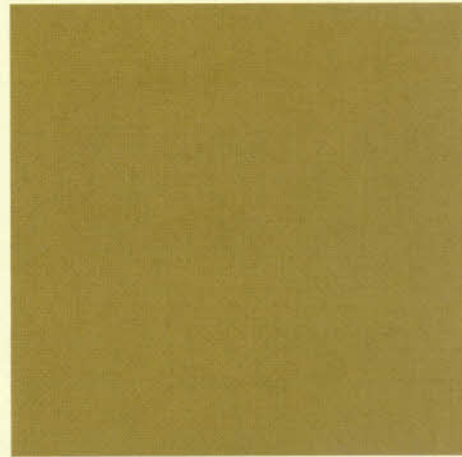
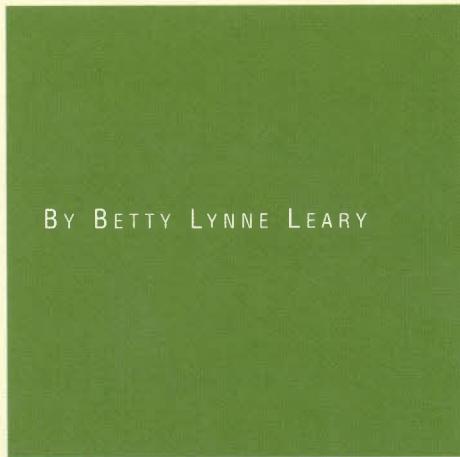
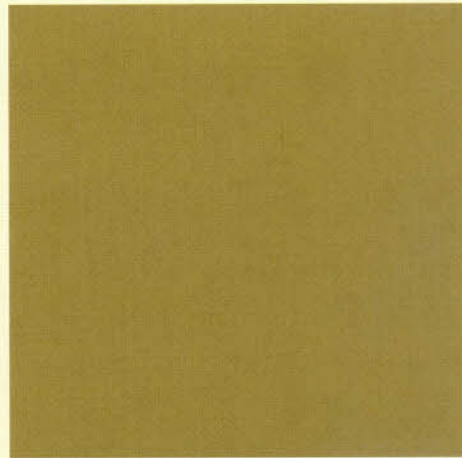
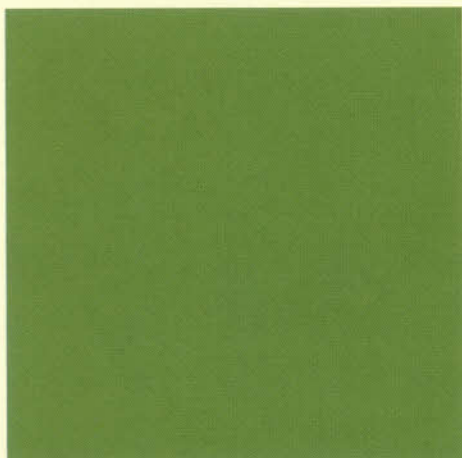


Courtroom Co

Members of the School's nationally recognized trial team take classroom learning into the mock courtroom.



mpetition

It's a classic case of he said, she said.

The man stands accused of stealing the day's cash receipts from his fast-food restaurant employer. His attorneys argue that the man deposited the receipts, and it was the bank teller who stole the money.

The attorneys move flawlessly through their paces of opening statements, direct and cross examinations of witnesses, introduction of exhibits and closing arguments.

As these "attorneys" leave the courtroom, they don't return to a high-rise office building downtown. They are members of the School of Law's trial team returning to the classroom after a valuable courtroom experience that puts them well-ahead of their peers on the road to becoming practicing trial lawyers.

In grueling regional and national three-day competitions, Maryland students go head-to-head with some of the best trial teams in the country. Designed to give students courtroom experience in a realistic setting, the competitions allow students to practice the skills and theories they've learned in class and to demonstrate their lawyering abilities. According to law school Professor Jerome Deise, the team's faculty coach for the past three years, the experience dramatically increases a student's comfort level in the courtroom.

"Students come out of this with as much experience as someone who's been practicing two or three years," Deise says. "And that appeals to law of 3 when they're hiring." Using one of the oldest forms of learning, the competitions give students the opportunity to see techniques other students use in the courtroom. "Trial lawyers

have always learned from other trial lawyers," he adds.

The trial team is part of a burgeoning advocacy program at the law school that includes appellate moot court, arbitration and mediation teams. The trial team comprises six third-year students and eight second-year students who are among the School's finest. Students face stiff competition each year in trying to secure one of the few coveted positions on the team. In selecting new members, Deise and the members of the team search for a special combination of intellect, ability, work ethic, personality and maturity.

"Students must be willing to work as a team because everybody learns from everybody else," he attests. Students who demonstrate ability and desire and can engage in a conversation with jurors make valuable team members. "We want our students to be themselves rather than try to affect one of the TV lawyers we sometimes see who merely speak at the jurors in legalese nonsense. Trial lawyers who make eye contact, and use voice, language and body movements to tell a persuasive story will be successful."

The trial team gained more formal status within the School of Law recently when a classroom component was added. Students meet weekly for two hours and can earn up to four academic credits for participating on the team. In preparation for two of the

competitions, organized by the American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) and the American Trial Lawyers Association (ATLA), students meet with evidence professors, judges and some of the best trial lawyers in the country.

"Students get a great deal of individualized attention. Many of our faculty, alumni, judges and experienced lawyers give of their time and considerable talents to help our students," Deise explains. Alumni often attend practice sessions, serve as judges for practice rounds and offer their insights and comments about the students' performances. The goal, Deise stresses, is to produce thinking lawyers, not mere technicians. "We want students to be thoughtful, not simple wind-up toys that can execute skills," he says. "We want our students to become the best lawyers that are inside of them."

Taraneh Azani, a third-year student, describes the adrenaline rush team members feel when they begin a competition. "You feel very competitive," she says. "Something inside you really wants to do a good job. You want to win." She notes that other teams can be very creative during the competition, so team members have to think on their feet and work well together under pressure. "It's very exciting. We get tired and bored with all of our practice trials, but the competitions are really great."

The students put in countless hours of preparation. They study the art of persuasion, logic and rhetoric, and how to be good storytellers. To connect effectively with the jury, students explore how jurors learn during a trial using different visual and audio tools. Deise even brings in a professional actor who introduces theater techniques and describes how to use the courtroom space effectively.

"A successful litigator uses purposeful movements," Deise says, "not just pacing back and forth like a mechanical bear in a shooting gallery."

In ACTL competitions, two teams of two members present a case with the organization providing witnesses. In ATLA competitions, two teams of four

participate but the teams provide their own witnesses. After receiving the case materials and the rules of the competition, teams begin the arduous process of researching evidentiary issues and reviewing jury instructions. Then they practice, practice, practice. While the teams put in many hours of difficult work in addition to normal class

teams, like Temple, considered one of the best teams in the country. Deise spearheads the efforts to prepare students for the competitions, but when the trials begin, he does not watch the teams compete.

"As a trial lawyer, it's just too nerve-racking for me to watch," he admits, "and the students don't need the addi-

become part of a thoughtful process that they take with them," Deise stresses. "That's not something they learn merely for the trial competitions. It's what distinguishes our program from many of the others."

"I'm a much better advocate because of this experience," Azani says, adding that it feels good to apply some of the knowledge she has learned in the classroom in a realistic setting. Azani and her teammates won high praise in last winter's regional competitions from judges who noted that the team was extremely advanced and performed "as if

"Students come out of this with as much experience as someone who's been practicing two or three years."

—Professor Jerome Deise

loads, Deise tries to impress upon them that winning isn't everything.

"We don't let this interfere with their education. It's a way to apply what they learn," he says. "It's an extension of their education and we try to keep it in perspective."

The hard work paid off last winter as the trial team won the ACTL Regional Championship in February, beating one of the rival Temple University teams and advancing to the national competition in Dallas. Just one month later, members of the trial team also advanced to the national level by winning the regional ATLA competition held in Washington, D.C. That team bested one of the Howard University

tional angst of having me watch them." And though many schools get caught up in the competitions, investing much of their time and resources to winning, Deise's feet remain firmly planted.

"Some schools put all their efforts into these competitions and while it's an important part of our program, there's so much more we offer here," he says. The School of Law provides a multidimensional approach to teaching advocacy, one that provides a strong foundation in substantive law, as well as the skills, techniques and strategies needed to advance the case theory in the form of a persuasive story. "We want to teach students useful skills and strategies that will

they'd been practicing law for 20 years." Statements like those make Deise very proud of his team. "We produce thoughtful, talented and skilled students. And we're known as a class act," he says. "Win or lose, our students show a high level of professionalism, civility and integrity. And that's very important to everyone at Maryland."

After months of working nights and weekends while their friends were relaxing or taking in the latest movie, those words carry a great deal of weight with Azani. "When we get that trophy, none of the hard work or lost weekends matter anymore," she says. "It's worth it."

2000 - 2001 Moot Court Board

